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SERMON CXIX.

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THE DUTY OF RESTITUTION.

LUKE XIX. 8.—*Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.*

Nothing is more obvious than the antipathy felt by a certain class of professed Christians against the preaching of morality, as if it infringed upon the great doctrine of justification by faith. If it be a cold, pagan, heartless, philosophic morality, detached from religion, and independent of its influence, let it be rejected—let it not be brought into the pulpit. Such a philosophy of morals presents erroneous views of the character of God, and the condition of man; appeals not openly to the revealed will of the Creator, as the standard of right and wrong; and enforces the obligations of virtue rather from the considerations of feeling, honor, and interest, than from those higher, nobler, purer motives which Jehovah addresses to us in his word. But if it be a morality founded upon Christian principle, and looking directly to the will of God as its rule, and the glory of God as its end, it is surely proper for the discussion of the pulpit, and suited to the state of man as a fallen creature. Men need to be reminded of the nature and indispensable necessity of Christian virtues, and to be often urged to the practical duties of the New Testament. The Savior often preached such morality, and the apostles inculcated it in all their epistles. It is enforced by the example of him who uttered the words which we have read to you: "*Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.*"

It is the language of Zaccheus, "the chief among the publicans;" that is, either the principal tax-gatherer, who had others under him, or else the most respectable and honorable man among that class at Jericho. To the Jews, the name and profession of a publican were excessively odious. They esteemed themselves a free people, maintained that they ought to have no other king but God, and submitted with great impatience to the Roman yoke. It is natural, therefore, to suppose that they regarded those who were employed to collect the foreign tribute as betrayers of the liberties of their country, and abettors of their enemies. The character of these men was another reason for the enmity which was felt for them. In general, they were persons in whom avarice, rapacity, and fraud were joined with excessive luxury and vile debauchery.

Behold one of this class incited to seek the grace and compassion of the Redeemer! He sees Jesus—receives him joyfully into his house—profits by his instructions—cheerfully obeys his will, and makes the public declaration: "*Behold, the half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.*" What a noble proof of the sincerity of his conversion! Sighs, tears, groans, fasts, all would have been unavail-

ing without this. God demands *actions* as evidence of our piety; requires us to "*bring forth fruits meet for repentance*;" and issues his command—"Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings; cease to do evil, learn to do well." What cheerful and implicit obedience does Zaccheus pay to this command! His penitence is announced by a prompt and firm resolution to do good, and to repair evil; to sacrifice his interest, that ruling passion, which had probably caused him to commit a thousand acts of injustice. He contents not himself with a simple desire—with one of those vain projects, the execution of which is deferred from day to day. He is ready *instantly* to do it; "the half of my goods I give to the poor." The Jews contented themselves with devoting the tenth part of their revenue to charitable purposes, but the penitent publican exceeds them, and gives "the half of" his "goods." He does more than this. He resembles not those who suppose that by their alms they can recover and repair their frauds; and who give to the poor only what they have obtained by injustice. Such men seem to think God a judge whom they can corrupt by a part of their booty, and appear secretly to use to him the language of those robbers mentioned in the book of Proverbs: "*Thou shalt have thy lot with us; we will all have one purse*;" thus hoping to secure a sanction to their injustice and fraud. Not so with Zaccheus. Though he consecrates a large portion of his estate to relieve the wants of the distressed, yet he reserves enough to compensate those whom he has defrauded, and to compensate them with interest;—"If I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him *fourfold*." This restitution the Roman laws obliged the tax-gatherers to make, when it was proved that they had abused their power by oppressing the people. But here was no such proof. The man, to show the sincerity of his conversion, does it of his own accord.

The duty enforced by the example of Zaccheus is that of **RESTITUTION**, or the act by which we restore to our neighbor that of which we have unjustly deprived him. Let us

I. *Show on what the duty is founded, and then*

II. *Inquire in what manner it should be performed.*

I. *The foundation of the duty of restitution.*

1. It is founded on the *very nature of justice*; for justice consists in rendering to every one what belongs to him. If we had no Scriptures to instruct us in the will of God on this point, still natural reason would sufficiently teach us that it is our duty to restore all that we have fraudulently acquired, or unjustly retained. Of all the human virtues, justice is first in importance. This is the cement of human society,—the spirit which connects all its members—which inspires its various relations, and maintains the order and subordination of every part. Without it, society would become a den of thieves and banditti, hating and hated, devouring and devoured by one another. Among many nations unvisited by Divine Revelation, the duty of restitution has been often enjoined, and declared by the laws necessary for the well-being of society. Among the ancient Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans it was demanded as a proper regard to the rights of others, and the means of preserving them sacred and inviolate. And among the Mahomedans it is enforced with equal rigor. "It is usual," says a writer familiar with the customs of the East, "when a Turk is near death, for his relations to approach his bed with all the papers that refer to his property, and presenting them to him one by one, to inquire whether his conscience accuses him of any injustice in the acquisition of his wealth. Without this examination, and the consequent reparation of any injury he has committed, he cannot gain admission into paradise."

My brethren, if Tyre and Sidon, Sodom and Gomorrah, will rise up against Jerusalem, and condemn it at the last day, will not these nations, covered as

they were with ignorance and delusion, rise up against those false Christians who live and die in the neglect of a duty so clearly taught by the light of nature, and so plainly founded upon the first principles of justice?

2. *Let us appeal to the Holy Scriptures.* In the 22d chapter of Exodus, in the 6th of Leviticus, and in the 5th of Numbers, we find express ordinances on this subject. "If a man shall steal an ox or a sheep, and kill it, or sell it, he shall restore five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep." "If a soul sin, and commit a trespass against the Lord, and lie unto his neighbor in that which was delivered him to keep, or in fellowship, or in a thing taken away by violence, or hath deceived his neighbor; or hath found that which was lost, and lieth concerning it, and swear-eth falsely; in any of all these that a man doeth, sinning therein; then it shall be, because he hath sinned and is guilty, that he shall restore that which he took violently away, or the thing which he hath deceitfully gotten, or that which was delivered him to keep, or the lost thing which he found; or all that about which he hath sworn falsely; he shall even restore it in the principal, and shall add the fifth part more thereto, and give it unto him to whom it pertaineth." "When a man or woman shall commit any sin that men commit, to do a trespass against the Lord, and that person be guilty, then they shall confess their sin which they have done; and he shall recompense his trespass with the principal part thereof, and add unto it the fifth part thereof, and give it unto him against whom he hath trespassed." In these passages the unjust person is solemnly ordered by God to restore to his neighbor whatever he had taken by fraud or violence. The prophet Ezekiel speaks the same sentiment: "If the wicked restore the pledge, and give again that he hath robbed, he shall surely live;" and consequently, if he refuse to restore the pledge, and to give back what he hath taken away, he shall die. In conformity with this law, Nehemiah required the people to make restitution of all that they had gained from taking advantage of the necessities of their brethren. In conformity with this law, Samuel, about to resign the government into the hands of Saul, says to the assembled people, "Behold, here I am: witness against me before the Lord, and before his anointed. Whose ox or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it you." In conformity with this law Zacchæus could not appease his conscience until he had made the resolution, "If I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold."

3. Restitution is a duty so indispensable, that *without it there is no salvation.* At first view this assertion may appear harsh and uncharitable; yet its truth must be evident upon the least reflection. Tell me, can we be saved without repentance? No! "Except ye repent ye shall perish," is the language of your Judge. But do we really repent of an injustice which we have committed, when we refuse to repair it? Do we not, on the contrary, cover with the mask of religious sorrow a real impenitence? Is it not mockery of God to declare to him that we bewail our acts of injustice, while we persist in keeping "the wages of iniquity?" Are not those under the most awful self-delusion who flatter themselves that their sins are forgiven, while they refuse to restore what they have illegally acquired, if it lie in the compass of their power? Tell me, can we be in a state of grace and salvation, when we are in actual rebellion against the orders of God? But whoever retains the property of another sins doubly, both against the law which commands him to restore it, and against that which forbids him to keep it. Tell me, can we be in a state of salvation, when we have no love to God, and no love to our neighbor? But the man who refuses to make restitution loves not God; for he despises his laws and tramples upon his authority—nor does he love his neighbor; for he voluntarily persists in wronging him, and withholding from him his rights. Were he to weep tears of blood, both the justice

and mercy of Jehovah would shut out his prayer, if he made no amends to his neighbor for the injury he may have done him. The mercy of God, through the blood of atonement, can alone pardon his guilt; but no dishonest man can expect this; and he is a dishonest man who illegally holds the property of another in his hand.

We proceed,

II. *To inquire what is necessary for the performance of this duty?*

1. *We must examine with care whether we have ever wronged our neighbor, and in how many modes we have done it.* We cannot too carefully examine ourselves on this subject, nor be too much guarded against the thousand illusions which men form to satisfy their consciences. To elude the duty of restitution, they will shut their eyes upon their conduct, and then plead ignorance. But behold Zaccheus! He perceives that it is very possible that in the exercise of his office he has committed many acts by which justice was violated and conscience wounded. The vow he utters in the presence of the Savior includes an engagement to make the most exact inquiries. "If I have taken *any* thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold." He specifies this particular kind of injustice, because it was the crime most familiar to his profession. Do you, in like manner, put your hand upon your consciences, impartially examine your past life, and recall your acts of injustice. Here, you spread a successful snare for the simplicity of another: there, you openly abused his confidence. Here, you took advantage of his ignorance; there, of his extreme need. These you dazzled by fair promises which were never performed; those, in some other mode, you artfully and cunningly deceived. Allege not for your excuse, example—custom—the necessity of acting like others. All this is of no avail now in the sight of the Omniscient—will be of no avail hereafter at the bar of God. No matter what others do—it is true, and as long as there is a distinction between right and wrong, it will be eternally true, that whatever you have obtained from your neighbor by open violence, or insidious over-reaching, is *his* property—not *yours*.

2. Restitution should be *prompt*. Many persons know that they have the property of another, and content themselves with a vague *intention* of restitution, and by this means lull their consciences to repose—"I will at some future time make restitution." But *when*? You as yet know not the time, and perhaps it may never arrive. Do you remember that the state in which you are is one of continual sin—that as many moments as you defer the reparation of the injury you have done to your neighbor, so many acts of injustice you are committing, which aggravate your first offence; and that, as long as you continue in your present condition you are the object of the Divine anger, and exposed to eternal woe? Do you remember that in deferring to make restitution, you render it more difficult, perhaps utterly impossible? Other cares will distract you—a sudden derangement of your affairs may put obstacles in the way of executing your projects—and death, which always arrives sooner than we expect—death may surprise you in the omission of this duty, and give you no opportunity of performing it; and then you are undone for ever. Zaccheus is a model to us of promptness of execution. He forms a fixed, vigorous resolution, which has for its object, not the future, but the present. He says not, "If I have done wrong to any man, I will restore it;" but "I restore it;"—even *now* I am ready to do it.

3. Restitution must be *full and entire*. Zaccheus does more than satisfy those whom he had wronged; for he resolves to restore *fourfold*. Fearful lest he should not fully recompense them, his generous heart makes the resolution, and his piety is ready instantly to execute it.

Your restitution must be *exact*. Calculate the extent of the damage which

your injustice, or your imprudence has caused to your neighbor—a damage often exceeding the value of the property of which you have deprived him. Calculate the injury which the loss of this property has been to him, the length of time that he has been deprived of it, and the gain hindered by your delay; and let your restitution be full and entire.

Such is the nature of this duty, and the manner in which it should be performed. But how many are there in the world, who, to elude the obligation, allege the most specious reasons—all mere pretexts, vanishing before the command of God.

If I make restitution, I cannot maintain that rank in society, that style of living, to which I have been accustomed. Look at Zaccheus! He lived, without doubt, in ease and splendor; but after distributing the half of his goods to the poor, after restoring fourfold to those whom he had defrauded, could he preserve the same style of living as before? But this does not hinder him from complying with his duty, and thus evincing the sincerity of his repentance. Nor should it prevent others from making restitution. Where do such men learn that the laws of society are to set aside the laws of the gospel, and the duties of justice? Where do they learn that happiness depends upon a certain style of living? No, no! there is no real happiness for them, while justice is continually calling for restitution. *"They shall not rejoice, because they have oppressed, neither shall they feel any quietness."* *"A little that an honest man hath is better than the riches of many wicked."* *"Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues without justice."*

But others refuse to make restitution, because they *desire to bequeath their property to their children.* But how can they in conscience believe that they owe to their children what their neighbor may rightfully claim? How can they lawfully leave to them what belongs to others? God tells us something of such property bequeathed to children; he tells us that it is an "accursed heritage." It is to such a parent that he says; *"I lay up iniquity for your children."* *"Thou hast consulted shame to thy house—for the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it."* Miserable indeed are the parents who are transmitting, by fraud and deception, the curse of Almighty God to their children, and their children's children to "the third and fourth generation."

Some admitting the necessity of restitution, say that they are *ashamed to make it.* But surely it is rather a matter of commendation. In acting, as did Zaccheus, you proclaim, not your shame, but your honesty—not your ignominy, but your fearless determination to comply with the dictates of justice and the commands of God. If the injury be private, let the restitution be private. Provided you do it effectually, you may be as prudent in the manner of accomplishing it, as you please. But *do it*, in some way or other, as you desire peace of conscience, as you dread endless perdition.

As far as I have been able to search the Scriptures on this subject, the duty of restitution knows no other obstacle than impossibility, and no other reserve than what is necessary for the support of life. It admits no other excuse than invincible ignorance, and has no other bound than reparation of the injury committed.

In view of this subject, I remark,

1. *How small is the number of those who are saved.* We have seen that the restoration of all which has been acquired by fraud or violence is indispensable for salvation. We know that thousands of frauds are daily committed; and yet how few acts of restitution do we witness—how many pretexts do we hear to preserve what has been illicitly obtained! "Where are the Christians," asks an eloquent divine, whose opportunities for observation were not limited—

"Where are the Christians who repent of the extortions of which their avarice has caused them to be guilty? Where are the Christians who have made *restitution*? It is said that there are some. I believe so, because credible people affirm it. But I solemnly declare, I have never seen one, and yet I have seen many people, whose hands were defiled with the accursed thing, whose magnificence and pomp were the fruit of the cursed thing. Extortioners of this kind I have seen; but I have never beheld one of them repenting, and saying, *indeed I have sinned, and thus and thus have I done*. In a word, I never saw one of them who understood, or was willing to learn, the elements of Christian morality on the doctrine of restitution. How rare soever the conversion of sinners of other kinds may be, thanks to Divine mercy, we have seen edifying examples of such conversions. We have seen voluptuous people groan at the recollection of their former debaucheries, efface the dissipations of their youth, and affix that body in a mortal illness to the cross of Christ, which, during health and strength they had devoted to luxury. We have seen assassins ready, if it were possible, to replace the blood they had shed with their own. We have seen vindictive people embrace inveterate enemies, and cover them with affectionate tears. But among that great number of dying people who, we know with the utmost certainty, had become rich by oblique means, among the great number of merchants and tradesmen who had been guilty of falsehood, deceit, cheating, and perjury, and who by such means had acquired a splendid fortune, we have never seen one who had the resolution to assemble his family around his dying bed, and to take leave of them in this manner—"My dear children, I have been a scandal to you through life, I will now edify you by my death; I am determined in these last moments of my life to give glory to God by acknowledging my past transgressions. The greatest part of my fortune was acquired by artful and wicked means: these elegant apartments are furnished with my oaths and perjuries: this strong and well-furnished house is founded on my treachery: my sumptuous and fashionable equipage is the produce of my extortions. But I repent now of my sins; I make restitution to church and state, to the public and to individuals; I choose rather to bequeath poverty to you than to leave you a patrimony under a curse. You will gain more by the example I give you of repentance, than you would by all my unjust acquisitions."—An age—a whole century—does it furnish one such example? Is not this the testimony of almost all ministers of the gospel? does it not present a faithful picture of human society? does it not strongly confirm what our Savior has declared; "*strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it*?"

2. *What great discoveries shall be made at the day of judgment.*—This world is a great theatre, on which too many act a borrowed character, conceal their motives, and by an imposing exterior, cover the most base and treacherous signs. What frauds and deceptions are continually employed by men to acquire or detain the property of others! what artifice and dissimulation are used to conceal the injustice in their own families, or in their own breasts! *But it shall all be revealed.* On that great day when the concerns of men shall be brought to the last trial, and irreversibly fixed for eternity, when the secrets of the human heart shall be unfolded, all these fraudulent acts of the unjust shall be exposed—not merely to those whom they oppressed, not merely to the community in which they lived, but to the universe. Then all their labyrinths shall be penetrated; all their darkness dissipated; all their deep designs disclosed. Then many who were regarded in the world as faithful, sincere, generous friends, shall be found vile, perfidious, without faith, or honor, or conscience. Many who were esteemed as men of integrity and approved

probity, whose reputation had attracted fresh honors, and acquired for them public confidence, shall be found to be those who abused the credulity of men; who under the pompous show of equity concealed a dishonorable heart; who, assuming the semblance of the just, were habitually guilty of the most humiliating dissimulation. Then the mask of hypocrisy shall drop; the cloak of religious profession shall be torn off; and the true character of those who sought and retained "the wages of unrighteousness" shall be fully exhibited. Then there will be seen many "painted sepulchres," blazing comets, "wandering and fallen stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever." What confusion shall cover them, what blackness gather on their countenance, what anguish pierce their souls, when they look back to the possessions for which they bartered their salvation, and to the fraud, the falsehood, and the injustice with which they elevated themselves to distinction. *"The heavens reveal their iniquities, and the earth rises up against them."* They are speechless with guilt, and stigmatized with infamy before all the armies of heaven, and all the nations of the redeemed. Then the awful threatening shall be fulfilled; *"Go to now, and weep, and howl for the miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten; your gold and your silver is cankered, and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold, the hire of the laborers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth."*

3. This subject teaches us the nature of true religion. It consists in benevolence to man as well as in love to God, and assures us that without the former we can never exercise the latter. It is most unscriptural to suppose that godliness holds its dominion only over the solemnities of public worship, or the devotion of the family, or the solitude of the closet. It leads to all the duties of civil and ordinary life. Would to God, my brethren, that you could see it in this aspect, and always bear it with you to your counting-houses, to your stores, to your shops; to all the contracts which you make; to every thing which you buy, and to all which you sell. Lay it not aside when you have finished the devotions of the closet, and the worship of the family; but carry it along with you into the world, and make it your companion and guide through the whole business of the day; always bearing on your heart the sentiment, *"Thou, God, seest me;"* always remembering that the least transaction must be regulated by the requirements of his holy law.

4. This subject should lead us to avoid the very beginning of sin, and to pay the most scrupulous attention to the duties of truth and justice. Thus we shall be prevented from defrauding our fellow men: thus, if necessity ever requires it, we shall be able easily to make restitution. "He that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much," and incurs the condemnation of God as effectually as if he were guilty of the greatest injustice. If he has parted with his honesty at an inferior price, and bartered it for a mere trifle, his guilt, far from being lessened, is rather aggravated, and the danger to which he is exposed is great. The moral principle is gone; the barrier which obstructed his progress is removed, and he is capable of wandering over the whole extent of the forbidden field. These little deceits attack the authority of the Divine Lawgiver as much as what are termed greater sins; impair the strength of the soul, and shake the foundation on which integrity rests. Wave succeeding wave undermines the fabric, and causes the whole building at length to fall. The thorns which at first could scarcely be seen, spread by degrees over the field, and choke the whole of the good seed. One sin naturally leads to another; the first step leads to the

second, until by degrees you come to the bottom of the precipice. Deceit, duplicity, and dissimulation in small matters, have a certain tendency to make you insincere on more important occasions, and may gradually destroy your character of integrity altogether. Fly therefore, I beseech you, from the first approaches of injustice; guard your innocence as you would guard your life. If you advance one step over the line which separates right from wrong—honesty from dishonesty—you know not how far you may wander into the “way of unrighteousness.” Come not then near the territories of sin, but stand at a distance from “the appearance of evil.” In all your transactions inquire *what is right*; and let all things bend to the answer; let every thing be sacrificed to truth and justice; let duty be strenuously performed to the “last jot and tittle” of exaction, remembering that the eye of God is upon you, and that the judgment of God is in reserve for you.

5. Finally, show by your conduct, ye who have in any degree defrauded your fellow men, that you feel the force of conscience and the truth of God; *imitate Zaccheus, and make restitution.* This discourse has presented you with a morality little suited to the taste of the age—with a doctrine terrible to very many modern Christians. But after all, my brethren, the difficulty of the duty which I preach arises not so much from the nature of the thing itself, as from the excessive attachment which men have for this world; from the feebleness of their faith, and the faintness of their desires for the things of heaven. Whoever has a lively and effectual belief in the providence of God, in the threatenings and promises of the gospel, finds nothing austere or painful in this duty. Imitate Zaccheus, then, and make restitution, if you have any regard for the tranquillity of your soul here, or its salvation hereafter. No man can enjoy property without peace of mind, and nothing puts a man more out of the possession of himself than an unquiet conscience; and *no sins lie so heavily upon a man's conscience as those of injustice, because they are committed against the clearest natural light.* Make restitution then, as far as possible, and as promptly as you can; or the remembrance of your injustice will be a perpetual disturber to you; will imbitter all your enjoyments; will “bite like a serpent, and sting like an adder.” Conscience keeps a faithful register of your actions, and passes upon them impartial sentence; is invested with authority over you, and armed with stings to punish you when guilty. If you retain the property of others, and refuse to restore them their rights, as certainly as pain follows the infliction of a wound, as surely will you experience this inward remorse. Conscience may be lulled to sleep for a while; but it will one day vindicate its rights, and the rights of the oppressed; it will seize you in an hour when you are not aware, and put you to the torture of an accusing mind; it will turn your visions of joy into scenes of horror; it will plead with you face to face, and declare that the gold and the silver, the houses and the lands, which are in your possession, *are not yours.* You may escape the punishment of the civil law; you may avoid the open opprobrium of your fellow men; you may be sure that no human eye saw your injustice, and that no mortal can discover it; but from this tormentor within you can never flee. If you go into society, it will meet you there, and show you in the countenances of all with whom you associate, a suspicion of your guilt. If you go into solitude, it will meet you there, and haunt you like a ghost; your troubled mind will behold forms which no others see, and hear voices which sound only in the ear of guilt: “*The stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timbers shall answer.*” “*You shall find no ease nor rest, for the Lord shall give you a trembling heart and sorrow of mind.* In the morning you will say, would to God it were even; and at even you will say, would to God it were morning; for the fear of your heart

wherewith you will fear, and for the sight which your eyes shall see." O! brethren, if you wish to avoid such pain and anguish, such horror and remorse, make immediate and full restitution. How great are the pleasures of a "good conscience!" How sweet the satisfaction to be able to say with the apostle, "*I have wronged no man, I have defrauded no man.*"

But chiefly from a regard to your future and eternal state, would I urge you to perform this duty. Without repentance you are ruined for ever; and without restitution (as we have already proved to you) there is no repentance. If you continue your oppressions and fraud, and carry these sins with you into the eternal world, as sure as God is just and true, they will "hang as a millstone about your neck," and sink you into endless ruin. He that wrongs his brother, and refuses him his right, hates him; "*and he that hateth his brother is a murderer, and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.*" "*Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?*" "*The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.*" There is no alternative, then, but RESTITUTION or PERDITION.

If these considerations have no effect upon you, and lead you not to restore what you have illegally acquired or detained, I can only say with the Angel, "*He that is unjust, let him be unjust still;*" let him continue his injustice at his peril; and let him remember what the Savior adds to the declaration: "*Behold I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give to every man according as his work shall be.*"

SERMON CXX.

BY REV. CHARLES WALKER,

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EVIDENCES OF TRUE CONVERSION.

LUKE XIX. 8, 9.—*And Zaccheus stood and said unto the Lord, Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give unto the poor, and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, this day is salvation come to this house.*

JESUS was passing through Jericho. A multitude attended him. So great was the crowd, that a certain man, who was little of stature, could not come near enough to see him. He therefore ran before, and climbed up into a tree, that he might obtain a sight of Jesus as he passed by. The Savior noticed him in this elevated situation, and said to him, "Zaccheus, make haste and come down, for to-day I must abide at thy house." He hastened down and received him joyfully. It is stated of this man that he "was chief among the publicans, and that he was rich." A publican was a collector of the taxes, or the tribute, which the Roman government imposed on the Jewish nation. Zaccheus had accumulated a large property, some of which, it may be presumed from his own statement, was obtained dishonestly, by oppression or fraud.

Whatever might have been the views and feelings of this man; whether mere curiosity or some better motive prompted his desire to see Jesus, it is evi-

dent that the instructions of the Divine Teacher had a powerful effect on his mind, and produced a striking change in his character and prospects. There can be no doubt that he had hitherto been a worldling. Love of money and desire of gain had been his ruling passion. He "had made gold his hope, and fine gold his confidence." His supreme object had been to lay up treasures on earth; and not being scrupulous in regard to the means of increasing his possessions, he had been successful. But from the time he received Jesus as a guest into his house, his whole character was changed. He became a new man. He believed in Christ, and showed the sincerity of his belief by a sacrifice of his former inclinations and habits. He adopted voluntarily a course of life which, considering his former character, must have been the strongest effort of self-denial. His avarice gave place to liberality. A benevolent spirit entered his bosom and crowded out selfishness. The entire object for which he had lived was given up as worthless and sinful. A new course of life was immediately arranged, and from the promptings of his own heart, he said, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold." Jesus, who saw that this statement was made in single-hearted honesty, immediately added—"This day is salvation come to this house."

In adopting cordially and effectively this determination, Zaccheus gave, considering his previous habits and circumstances, the strongest possible proof of having become a disciple of Jesus—of having been "born again." He stood forth, in view of heaven and earth, a new man; not because he made any statement of the exercises of his mind by which he had been brought to his present feelings and determination; not because he told what is called a *religious experience*, for it does not appear that he related any thing of the kind, but because his ruling passion was subdued; because a spirit of self-denial had taken up its lodgment in his bosom, and dethroned selfishness; because he was willing to forsake that which was most dear to him for the sake of Christ. From the conditions of discipleship which Jesus imposed, he did not shrink. He cordially met and assumed them. This he proved by the sacrifice of his most darling and long-cherished passion. And having thus, with the assistance of divine grace, overcome the love of money, which was his strongest sinful propensity, he would of course be able, with the same assistance, to master every subordinate passion, and to comply with all the requisitions of the gospel. Having vanquished and driven out "the strong man armed," he would be able, with comparative ease, to subdue all the auxiliaries which had assisted the tyrant in maintaining a throne in his bosom.

I shall proceed with this discourse by a series of observations on the text and the foregoing train of thought.

1. *When the gospel is cordially received and fully embraced, it subdues a man's ruling sin.*

In the case of the individual mentioned in the text, this observation is manifestly correct. An avaricious disposition, which was evidently his ruling passion, was subdued, and he became liberal and benevolent. That particular disposition which in him presented the greatest obstacles to his becoming a follower of Christ, was the first that was met and overcome by the influence of religious principle. And when his love of wealth was subdued, which had hitherto been his controlling passion, it would be comparatively easy to hold in subjection all his other passions. The gospel had made a conquest of the *man* when it had slain his covetousness. Whereas, if some subordinate passion only had received a check; if the influence had extended only to the subduing or regulating of some wrong disposition which exerted but a feeble control over the character;

the man, in all important respects, would have remained in his previous state. His ruling passion would have been the same; and though some change might have taken place in his feelings and habits, yet the man himself would have been unchanged, unrenewed.

The principle here brought to view is exceedingly important, and should be kept in mind whenever we enter on an examination of the evidence of Christian character. When a man yields himself sincerely and cordially to the influence of the gospel, his strongest and most prevailing sinful propensities are subdued. It is not said that they are wholly eradicated, and will therefore exert no influence over him. But they will be held in check; they no longer give laws to the man, and domineer over him; they are as prisoners bound by One stronger than they. True, they may struggle for liberty and power, and in their struggles may sometimes cause the man to stumble. But if he is a real Christian, he is no longer their slave. He serves another Master, "who will not suffer him to be tempted above what he is able to bear," but will, with the temptation, make a way to escape.

Too often, in forming an estimate of Christian character, is this important truth overlooked. Too often, in judging of ourselves and of each other, "the sin which most easily besets" is spared and tolerated, perhaps even justified. As a kind of apology for the indulgence of some sinful habit or passion, it is said to be natural; and therefore it is taken for granted, not only that it will always adhere to the character, but that it is, in some degree, excusable. The man who has a strong appetite for spirituous liquors, though this appetite has been acquired by sinful indulgence, finds a ready extenuation of his guilt in the strength of his desire for intoxicating drinks; and thus the circumstance which most of all aggravates his criminality is brought forward as an excuse. Another man is exceedingly irritable. On the least provocation, and often without any provocation, his angry feelings get the mastery of him. This man, though he may profess to be a Christian, often pleads the strength of his passion as an excuse for its indulgence. Another man is avaricious. He cherishes an inordinate desire of wealth, and makes the object of acquiring property the all-absorbing business of his life. This man, too, may profess to be a Christian, and as an apology for his worldly spirit he pleads that it is constitutional, or, what is more common, he perverts the language of St. Paul respecting the duty of providing for one's own house, and says he is only attending to his duty. Now all this is wrong, deceptive, ruinous. The statements of Scripture, corroborated by a thousand facts, show us that the gospel, when fully received and cordially embraced, subdues and keeps in subjection the ruling sinful propensities of the human heart. This is one grand design of the gospel; and if it does not exert this influence over the man who professes to believe its doctrines and discharge its duties, it is not in his case the power of God unto salvation. He is yet a stranger to its saving power. It is not denied that the true Christian may be more beset and harassed with what in his impenitent state used to be his peculiar and predominating sin than with any other. Against this he may be obliged to keep his most watchful guard. But it is true, also, that at this point of watchfulness and contest the principles of religion will afford him their most efficient aid, for here he most needs their assistance. In such circumstances of warfare and trial, one of the early disciples heard the kind Savior say, "My grace is sufficient for thee." And the same cheering promise is made to every faithful Christian in all ages of the world.

On this point of inquiry, therefore, should every professed Christian maintain a habit of careful self-examination. He should look earnestly at that sinful disposition or habit, whatever it may be, which has heretofore exerted the greatest

sway over him, and inquire what influence the gospel has had in subduing and controlling it. Is he naturally passionate? The spirit of the gospel is mild and peaceable, and if he has imbibed this spirit, it will aid him in overcoming his easily besetting sin. Is he naturally morose? The gospel, if he has cordially embraced it, has made him kind and amiable. Is he naturally covetous? The gospel, if he has become a Christian, has taught him to prefer the interests of eternity to those of time—has kindled in his bosom a benevolent spirit, and extended his hand in acts of cheerful liberality. Such, in some degree at least, are the effects of a Christian spirit whenever it takes up its abode in the human bosom. It aids a man in resisting and subduing "the sin which most easily besets him." And that professed Christian, whose experience and character furnish no evidence of the truth of this statement, remains "in darkness even until now." A ruling sinful propensity must not be spared; for if left to exert its baneful influence, it will render useless all attempts at reformation in other respects.

2. *Evidence of Christian character is to be sought, not so much in what a man says, as in what he does.*

To explain what is particularly intended by this observation, it is proper to remark, that a very common way of judging respecting a man's Christian character is to listen to a statement of what is termed his *religious experience*. If he has had, according to his own statement, certain feelings of anxiety and distress on account of his sins, and has found relief and peace in casting himself, as he supposes, on the mercy of the Savior; it is taken for proof, both by himself and by others, that he is a true Christian. In this manner, what a man *says* respecting his religious experience is made the evidence of his piety, instead of what he *does* in the labors and self-denial of a Christian life. His past feelings, rather than his present doings and determinations, are relied on as proof of his having embraced the religion of Jesus Christ. This is at variance with the rules laid down in the gospel. It is altogether different from the method of judging adopted by our Savior in the text.

It does not appear that Zaccheus related any of the exercises of his mind by which he had been led to the determination of becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ. He told no story of conviction and conversion. No doubt he had mental exercises—had a religious experience—was convinced of sin and found peace in believing. All this is sufficiently manifested by what he did. But instead of coming forward with a statement of the feelings which had agitated his bosom, and of the mental operations by which he had been induced to cherish the hope and seek the privileges of a Christian, he merely said—"Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have taken any thing of any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold." This, in the view of the Savior, was proof that he had cordially complied with the terms of salvation, and had become a new man. Jesus therefore replied, "This day is salvation come to this house."

In forming and executing this determination, Zaccheus gave the strongest possible proof, in his own case, of the subjection of his whole soul to the influence of the gospel. He renounced his idol, and resolved to honor God. He gave up the world, and determined to live for heaven. He was willing to deny himself at the Savior's bidding, and manifested the sincerity of that willingness by parting with that which had hitherto been most dear to him. He sacrificed at once his love of the world on the altar of Christian benevolence. On such evidence as this, the Savior pronounced his salvation secure. And on such a spirit and such sacrifices does the gospel everywhere most strenuously insist. How often, in the Scriptures, are we required to *deny* ourselves—to sacrifice our worldly interests to promote the kingdom of Christ. How often are we told

not to love the world, nor be conformed to it; to set our affections on things above, not on things on the earth; to regard ourselves not as our own, but as bought with a price, and therefore bound to serve our new Master, and glorify God with our bodies and spirits, which are his. A compliance with these duties cannot be rendered without self-denial. Our earthly affections must be held in check; our natural inclinations must be subdued. Instead of living for this world, or living for ourselves, we must live for Christ. To Him belong our time, our influence, our property. And he who *acts* on this principle—whether he can tell the particular manner in which he was brought to act thus, or not—gives incomparably better evidence of piety than any one can do by relating an experience, be it ever so striking or remarkable. Indeed, the latter is no evidence at all of Christian character unless it be accompanied by the former.

Far be it from me, by these remarks, to prohibit any man from relating the manner in which his mind has been exercised on religious subjects, and he has been brought, as he trusts, cordially to accept the terms of salvation proposed in the gospel. Such relations may, many times, be interesting and useful. But they are not, in themselves, to be depended on. There may be deception. Satan transforms himself into an angel of light. A man may imagine that he has had exercises of mind which afford him a proper ground for cherishing the hope that he is a Christian, when not a single sinful passion in his soul has been subdued, nor a single tie binding him to the world has been loosened. He may be able to tell a story of his mental exercises to which even true Christians may listen with delight; while he still remains wedded to the world, seeks the honor that cometh from man, and not that which cometh from God only, and neither has, nor honestly seeks to have, any treasure laid up in heaven. There are false, as well as genuine religious experiences; and the language used to describe them may be so similar that man cannot distinguish them. Some of the most striking, and, at the time, most satisfactory relations of mental exercises on religious subjects, have proved, in future time, to be nothing but delusion. How then shall the question, whether a man is a true Christian, be decided? Evidently by looking at his doings. Those acts of self-denial, which the gospel requires of men as long as they live, cannot well be counterfeited. Men do not habitually and perseveringly *do* what they dislike to do. The conduct shows the state of the heart. After all that a man can say respecting his feelings, it is by what he is inclined to do that a judgment is to be formed of his character.

In examining a candidate for admission to the church, I would rather ascertain that he had deliberately commenced a course of self-denying Christian duty and effort, than to hear the most imposing account of the exercises of his mind. Is he disposed to expend time and property in the service of Christ? If he has defrauded any man, will he restore the unjust gain? Will he be prompt and cheerful in attending all those social meetings which are necessary to keep alive the spirit of piety and advance the interests of religion? Will he set aside his worldly concerns, even when it may subject him to some loss, for the purpose of attending to religious duties? Will he consecrate a portion of his time, whatever may be the calls or clamors of the world, to the duties of prayer, of reading the Scriptures, and of exerting a Christian influence over others? Will he freely, cheerfully, and liberally give of his property to sustain the institutions of religion and build up the kingdom of the Redeemer? Or, in other words, will he "deny himself"—will he sacrifice the world on the altar of religion? The man who will do this habitually—though he may not have a flaming experience to relate—has the spirit of the gospel. Jesus owns him as a disciple now, and will take him to himself "when he maketh up his jewels." But the man who will not do this—who has nothing of the spirit which manifests itself in such doings

—is not a disciple of Jesus Christ. And whatever striking or wonderful account he may give of his own feelings, he is still "in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity."

I have many fears that the principle developed in the text, according to which Jesus Christ pronounced Zaccheus to be in the way of salvation, is too frequently overlooked, even by evangelical churches, in the admission of members. Adhering to the scriptural rule that men "must be born again" before they are prepared to make a worthy profession of religion, and knowing that such a change does not occur without deep and agitating emotion in the human bosom, our churches have adopted the practice of listening to a recital of these mental exercises from the candidate for their communion, and of judging of his qualifications by what they can discover of the nature of these exercises. And their judgment is often formed without any particular inquiry into the candidate's habits, and his determinations respecting the manner in which he will employ his time and influence and property. If he can relate a "religious experience" which shall be acceptable to his examiners, it is taken for granted that he is a Christian. Now, as was before remarked, there can be no valid objection against instituting an inquiry into the mental exercises of one who desires the privileges of membership in the church of Christ. Such an inquiry, perhaps, ought never to be omitted. But on the result alone of such an examination we ought never to rely for evidence of Christian character. Could my voice reach every Christian minister and church in the land, I would, with much earnestness and solicitude, say,—My brethren, ascertain the *doings* of the candidate for your fellowship. How does he employ his time? How does he exert his influence? What does he do with his property? Ask him—Will you habitually observe all the known duties of religion? When worldly business presses, will you put it aside for devotion, in secret, in the family, and in the public meeting? Do you deliberately determine that the religion you wish to profess shall cost you something to maintain it? Will you be punctual at the meetings of the church, not only on the Sabbath, but on other days? Will you habitually be present at the monthly concert, and come not only with your prayers, but, as God hath prospered you, with your alms also? Is it your fixed purpose, according to the measure of your ability, to assist the church in the great enterprises of Christian benevolence, by direct personal efforts for the conversion of men, and by contributing of your worldly substance to send the gospel to the destitute? Do you regard all these things as Christian duties? And is it your deliberate and solemn determination to observe them as long as you live? If you are rich, will you do these things? If you are poor, will you "do what you can?" Should the candidate answer these questions, or other questions involving these principles, affirmatively, and you have reason to believe that he means what he says, receive him. He will be a useful member of the church. But if his views and feelings are opposed to such a course of life—whatever story he may tell about his conversion—reject him. In such a case he would not be a help, but a hindrance to the work of the church; and his profession of religion would be nothing but an opiate for his conscience, while he pursued a course of worldly conformity down to the shades of eternal death. The church needs "working men." No others will aid her. No others are like her Divine Master.

3. *On the disposal of property, there is a wide difference between the opinions of men and the instructions of Jesus Christ.*

Instead of supposing that it would be for the "salvation" of his house, for Zaccheus to give away his property as he did, most men would think it the ruin of his family. Were an event of this kind to take place at the present day, the

multitude would exclaim—"What a foolish man! Give away one-half of his property at once, and then make a promise which will take away a large portion of the other half! Why the man is beside himself. He is plunging into poverty. He is injuring his family and bringing destruction on his own house." But what said Jesus Christ on an occasion of this kind? "This day is *salvation* come to this house." Zaccheus became a follower of Jesus, and trusting in him, he obtained "the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." He did not purchase salvation with money. He believed in Jesus. This was the ground of his salvation. Then he showed the sincerity and the fruits of his belief, by letting go his hold on the world, and making a voluntary and liberal sacrifice for the good of men and the honor of religion. Such a sacrifice Christ commended. Such a sacrifice the world would condemn. Here the opinions of Christ and those of the world are at variance. And not only the great mass of mankind, who make no profession of serious piety, differ from the Savior on this point; but many professors of religion unite with them in opposing the views and precepts of the Son of God. By many who profess the religion of the gospel, it is not esteemed either necessary or right to make large sacrifices of property for the good of man and the glory of God.

Suppose that a member of this church should come forward, and, from love to Christ and his cause, should give at once one-half of his property to bless and to save his fellow men; would not many of his brethren say—"He has done wrong? He has a family to provide for, and he ought not to deprive them of an inheritance. He is increasing in years, and will want in his old age what he can lay up." But if this would be wrong, why did the Savior commend Zaccheus for doing the same thing? He gives away half of his property at once, and out of the remainder satisfies all the claims of justice against him. Doubtless he had but a small portion left. What would become of *his* family, and what would he do in old age? A sufficient answer to these questions is—that Jesus approved of what he did. Or, suppose that a member of this church, without giving away one-half of his property, should bestow on objects of Christian benevolence an amount which would really make him a poorer man, diminish to some extent his capital, and lessen the sphere of his worldly operations. Would not many of his brethren think he did wrong? Would not the same expressions concerning the duty of laying up property for his children, and of providing for the wants of his own declining age which were mentioned in the preceding case, be repeated in this? But what would the Savior say to such sacrifices made from love to himself? What *did* he say respecting the use of property? "I say unto you, make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." That is, use your property in such a manner as to promote your eternal happiness. What *will* the Savior say at the day of judgment? "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto *me*."

There is, I am fully persuaded, an utter variance between the views of Jesus Christ in regard to the use of property, and the views of most of those who bear his name. And to this cause more than to any other it is owing, that Christianity has made such slow progress in the world. The maxims and customs of the world on this subject have been to a great extent the maxims and customs of the church. The professed disciples of Jesus have been so devoted to the object of worldly gain, that they have done comparatively little to extend the kingdom of Christ. When called upon to pray for the extension of his kingdom, their worldly spirit has chilled the spirit of prayer. When urged to contribute of their substance, and to engage in active labors for the salvation of men, the same worldly spirit has paralyzed all the benevolent energies of their souls. There

are, thanks to God, many exceptions to this rule. There are many who do love to pray, and labor, and contribute of their property for the advancement of Christ's kingdom. The exertions of these have, by the blessing of God, wrought much for the salvation of men and the glory of Christ. The Lord increase their number a thousand-fold!

Here, perhaps, some may be disposed to ask—"What would you have us do? Would you say that we must actually give away at once one-half of our property to promote the welfare of our fellow men?" My friends, I should not dare to assume the responsibility of deciding how much any man must give for this object, except in regard to myself; and this I must decide. I should not dare to tell you, in all cases, what portion of your property should be given for the purpose of saving men and advancing Christ's kingdom. It is a question which each man, on his own responsibility, must decide for himself. But this I say on the authority of the Divine word, that Jesus Christ demands your *all*—yourselves, your property, your influence, your time,—all presented as "a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God." This demand may not require that you sell all your property, and throw the avails of it at once into the treasury of benevolence. But it does require that you cultivate your farms, prosecute your trades, pursue your merchandise, or attend to the business of your office, with the constant design of glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ in your calling; and with the fixed purpose of being habitually, according to your means, a liberal and "cheerful giver." The demand of the Savior does require that your object shall be, not to hoard up money, but to "do good—be ready to distribute, willing to communicate." It does require that you stand prepared, with willing mind and ready hand, to give of your substance, "as the Lord hath prospered you," to an amount that will constitute a *sacrifice* for Christ's sake, and make it *self-denial* on your part. So much, at least, does the Lord Jesus Christ demand of every professed disciple. When, therefore, you are settling the question *how much* you shall give to promote the interests of religion, and to save the souls of your fellow men, think of Christ's demands, and think also that you are to render to him an account of your stewardship at the day of judgment.

When, O when, shall the day come in which professed Christians will act fully in the spirit and on the terms of their discipleship? When will they feel that they are to be agents, active, untiring agents, in the work of converting a world? When will they learn to "seek first the kingdom of heaven," and to believe the promise that "all these things shall be added?" When will they give full credit to the Divine declaration, "The liberal soul shall be made fat, and he that watereth shall be watered also himself?" When will they, with unanimous consent, pour forth a continued stream of benevolence, believing that God will, as he has promised, replenish the fountain? The Lord hasten that day. Come it must; or the shout will never be heard—"The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdom of Christ." Come it will; for the decree has gone forth, that at some future time, "all shall know the Lord, from the least to the greatest." This glorious result is to be effected by the instrumentality of Christians. Awake, then, ye friends of the Savior. Do the Lord's work, and see if he will not take care of you and yours. *Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in my house; and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.*